

PM in Doha: LDCs need 5 key support from dev partners

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Online Desk: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Monday sought five key supports from development partners to make smart, innovative and knowledge-based society in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to promote a peaceful, just and inclusive global society. “A smart, innovative and knowledge-based society will help promote a peaceful, just and inclusive society,” she said. The premier was elaborating the five key supports of development partners while speaking at a side event titled “Investment in Research and Development in LDCs for Smart and Innovative Societies” held at Auditorium-3 of Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC) in Doha, BSS reports.

The event was held on the sidelines of the 5th United Nations Conference on LDCs. As the first key support of development partners, Sheikh Hasina called for providing appropriate incentives to the international private sector for impactful technology transfer to LDCs, including for climate action. Secondly, she said: help investing in digital infrastructures to reduce broadband divide and tech discriminations in LDCs.

Thirdly, she said foster collaboration among research professionals and institutes to address issues and challenges facing LDCs. As fourth the premier called for continuation of LDC waivers under TRIPS agreement, also beyond graduation, especially for pharmaceuticals and agro-chemicals. And finally, she said: support developing an intellectual property regime conducive to both innovation and development in LDCs.

Sheikh Hasina also mentioned her goal to go much further to the next vision of building ‘Smart Bangladesh’ by 2041. “It will be based on four core elements: Smart Citizen, Smart Government, Smart Society and Smart Economy,” she said. The premier said in 2009, while her government made a pledge to the people to build a “Digital Bangladesh” by 2021, at that time, it sounded like a tall order. “But, the COVID-19 pandemic proved that we could redeem that pledge,” she added. She said the pandemic reminded that LDCs cannot wait to invest in scientific research and technological innovation. “Such investments are a must for advancing their economies through productive capacity building,” she said.

The prime minister mentioned that LDCs average GDP expenditure for research and development still remains below 0.6 percent, and only a handful of them feature in the Global Innovation Index. “But, LDCs cannot afford to lag behind with the advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution,” she said, adding, “Our young people should be made part of the Future of Work. We need meaningful global partnership for that,” she said. Sheikh Hasina said Bangladesh qualified for LDC graduation in 2021 under all three criteria.

“We are now preparing for graduation in 2026. During this transition, investment in science, technology and innovation is a priority for our government. We are working with the UN Technology Bank for LDCs on a national needs assessment,” she said. She also said that her government attaches importance to promoting a scientific mindset in the education system. “We’ve established a host of Science and Technology Universities and specialized institutes around the country,” she added. Sheikh Hasina said that the government has introduced the “Bangabandhu Science and Technology Fellowship” and “National Science and Technology Fellowship”.

She mentioned the new focus on Blended Education is aimed at developing IT skills for all. In this regard, she said that Sheikh Russel Digital Labs and Schools of Future are being set up across educational institutions. Bangladesh now has the world’s second largest community of registered IT freelancers, and a new Institute of Frontier Technology is in the making for supporting high-end research and development, she said. The prime minister said following the launch of Bangabandhu-I communication satellite, the government is now planning for own earth observation satellite.

“Bangladesh had to invest in improving early warning and weather forecast systems to drastically reduce natural disaster risks,” she added. Sheikh Hasina said the government has worked on a host of home-grown climate adaptation measures, including through technological applications. “We also need access to mitigation technologies to further curb greenhouse gas emissions. Our government is building two nuclear power plants as part of a clean energy transition. We aim to increase our share of renewable energy, preferably with floating solar panels, offshore wind turbines and green hydrogen,” she said.

The premier said that the government has given emphasis on supporting agricultural research which made it possible for Bangladesh to combat hunger and become largely food secure. “We are investing further in making our agriculture and livestock smart and environment-friendly. We stand ready to share our good practices with other LDCs through various means, including contract farming,” she added. Talking about government’s present focus on enhancing scope for medical research, Sheikh Hasina said that climate change impacts on public health are being manifested through new disease burdens. “We must have international collaboration for research in neglected tropical diseases,” she said, adding, “We urgently need investments in developing new treatments for anti-microbial resistance”.

In Bangladesh, she said they have 18,000 community clinics and health centers providing essential medicines and insulin free of cost. “We’ve brought down infant mortality to 21 per thousand and maternal mortality to 163 per one hundred thousand live births,” she said, adding, “Our pharmaceutical industry can meet 98 percent of our local demand for medicines.”

During COVID-19, the premier said Bangladesh’s digital readiness helped it manage the crisis and its recovery. “We developed a National Data Intelligence Platform to contain the virus,” she said. Digital contents were uploaded on an e-learning platform for uninterrupted education, she said, adding a digital aid management system helped provide financial relief to 5 million poor families.